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BOSWELL'S JOHNSON

AN ESSAY.

BY

LORD MACAULAY.

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LORD MACAULAY'S ESSAY

OR

BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON.

Edited with Notes

MAINLY BY

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LIFE OF MACAULAY.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, the great historian of England, was born at Rothley, near Leicester, in 1800, and was named Thomas Babington after his uncle. Macaulay's grandfather was a Scotch minister, and his father, Zachary, after having spent some time in Jamaica, returned to England, and joined Wilberforce and Clarkson in their efforts to abolish slavery in the British possessions. Macaulay was educated at Bristol and at Cambridge, where he gained great distinction, and twice won medals for his poems. He was also a member of the Union Debating Society, a famous club where young politicians tried their skill in the discussion of the affairs of State. He took his degree of M.A. in 1825, was called to the bar in 1826, and contributed extensively to Knight's *Quarterly Magazine*, in which his first literary efforts appeared, including among others the ballads of "The Spanish Armada" and "The Battle of Ivry." In 1825 he contributed to the *Edinburgh Review* his celebrated article on Milton, and this was succeeded by numerous others on various themes, historical, political, and literary, which were afterward collected and published separately.

Macaulay was a member of Parliament first for Colne, then for Leeds, and took part in the great discussions connected with the Reform Bill of 1832. In return for his services to his party, he was sent to India in 1834 as a member of the Council, and while there wrote his famous essays on *Lord Clive* and *Warren Hastings*. In 1839 Macaulay returned to England, was elected member for Edinburgh, and, during the eight years of his connection with that city, held successively the offices of Secretary at War and Paymaster-General of the Forces. In 1842 he gave to the world his spirited "Lays of Ancient Rome." In 1847 he displeased his Edinburgh supporters, and in a pet they rejected him; but in 1852 they re-elected him of their own accord, and in this way endeavored to atone for the past. He devoted the interval between these two dates to his *History of England*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1848, two others making their appearance in 1855. They form a magnificent fragment of historical writing, embracing a period of little more than twelve years, from the accession of James II. to the Peace of Ryswick, in 1697. A fifth volume, compiled from the papers which he left

behind, and bringing the work down to the death of William III., was published posthumously in 1859. He retired from Parliament in 1856, owing to failing health, and in the following year he was created a baron in consideration of his great literary merit. In 1859 he died suddenly of disease of the heart, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Lord Macaulay excelled as a poet and essayist, but he is chiefly illustrious as a historian. In the opening chapter of his *History of England* the author announces his intention to write a history from the accession of James II. down to a time within the memory of men still living. Its success was very great. History was no longer dry and uninviting, for Macaulay had become a painter as well as a chronicler. The events of the past are depicted in such fresh and striking coloring that they have all the interest of absolute novelty. We have life-like portraits of the great men of the age, landscapes and street scenes, spirit-stirring descriptions of insurrections and trials and sieges, and graphic pictures of manners and customs. Macaulay had a very wonderful memory, of which he was proud, and he was able to collect and retain stores of information from all manner of old books, papers, and parchments, and to make use of them in the production of his history. He is not always impartial, but sufficiently so to be considered the best authority on that portion of history with which he deals.

Macaulay's personal appearance was never better described than in two sentences of Praed's Introduction to Knight's *Quarterly Magazine*: "There comes up a short manly figure, marvelously upright, with a bad neckcloth, and one hand in his waistcoat pocket. Of regular beauty he had little to boast; but in faces where there is an expression of great power, or great good humor, or both, you do not regret its absence." This picture, in which every touch is correct, tells us all that there is to be told. He had a massive head, and features of a powerful and rugged cast; but so constantly lighted up by every joyful and ennobling emotion, that it mattered little if, when absolutely quiescent, his face was rather homely than handsome. While conversing at table, no one thought him otherwise than good-looking; but when he rose he was seen to be short and stout in figure. He at all times sat and stood straight, full, and square. He dressed badly, but not cheaply. His clothes, though ill put on, were good, and his wardrobe was always enormously over-stocked. Macaulay was bored in the best of society, but took unceasing delight in children. He was the best of playfellows unrivaled in the invention of games, and never weary of repeating them.

BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON.

BOSWELL'S book has done for Johnson more than the best of his own books could do. The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works. But the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive. The old philosopher is still among us in the brown coat with the metal buttons and the shirt which ought to be at wash, blinking, puffing, rolling his head, drumming with his fingers, tearing his meat like a tiger, and swallowing his tea in oceans. No human being who has been more than seventy years in the grave is so well known to us.—MACAULAY, *The Edinburgh Review*, December, 1856.

“A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge.” This it is that opens the whole mind, quickens every faculty of the intellect to do its fit work, that of knowing; and therefore by sure consequence of *vividly uttering* forth. See, for example, what a small Boswell can do.—CARLYLE, *Fraser's Magazine*, April, 1832.

Dr. Johnson was a man of extraordinary powers, but Mr. Boswell had qualities in their own way almost as rare. He united lively manners with indefatigable diligence, and the volatile curiosity of a man about town with the drudgery of a chronicler. With a very good opinion of himself, he was quick in discerning and frank in applauding the excellences of others.—MR. CROKER, Boswell's Publisher.

Vanity and folly by no means make up the whole mental equipment of Boswell. Nor could the most veracious fool have written such a dexterously artistic book: nothing has suffered in his hands; he adds not one word too much, but gives us the most vivid dramatic pictures by a few simple but subtle strokes. This is not the work of memory nearly so much as of artistic production; it is not photographic and realistic half so much as it is idealistic and creative. We have here a special literary faculty, and, moreover, one of the rarest. He had in him something of the true Shakespeare secret.—*Life of Boswell*, PERCY FITZGERALD.



LIFE OF BOSWELL.

JAMES BOSWELL, Esq., of Auchinleck, in Ayrshire, Scotland, celebrated as the friend and biographer of Dr. Samuel Johnson, was born October 29, 1740, at Edinburgh, where his father was one of the judges of the Court of Session, and as such was styled Lord Auchinleck.

He was intended by his father for the profession of an advocate, and studied first at Glasgow, and afterwards at the then famous university of Utrecht, to which he went in 1763. When in London in that year he made the acquaintance of Johnson, an event of decisive importance for his whole subsequent life. The acquaintance was earnestly sought by himself, the desire originating in his strong literary tastes and his ardent admiration of Johnson's writings.

He spent one winter at Utrecht, and then proceeded on a tour through Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and visited Corsica with a letter of introduction from Rousseau to Paoli, with whom he contracted a warm and lasting friendship. He enthusiastically adopted the cause of Corsican independence; and after his return to Scotland published, in 1768, an *Account of Corsica*, with *Memoirs of General Pasquale Di Paoli*, which was speedily translated into several languages.

Boswell became a member of the Faculty of Advocates in 1766, but never devoted himself with earnestness to the business of law.

In 1773 he was admitted into the Literary Club instituted by Johnson, and of which Burke, Goldsmith, Reynolds, and Garrick were members. From this time he made it his principal business to note down the sayings and doings of Johnson, with whom he associated on most intimate terms, and whom he accompanied on his tour in Scotland and the Hebrides in 1773.

Boswell was married in 1769 to a lady named Montgomery, by whom he had several children. Led by his taste for London society he removed thither at a mature period of life, and entered at the English bar, but without attaining to any success in the profession.

After Johnson's death in 1784, Boswell employed himself in arranging the materials which he had collected, and preparing his long-contemplated biography. His *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* appeared in 1785; his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, in 2 vols., in 1791. Both have gone through many editions. Boswell has been emphatically styled by Macaulay "the first of biographers." His work is indeed full of details, but they are such as exhibit character, and are arranged in the most interesting manner. He neither conceals his own faults nor those of Johnson, but presents a picture of which the truthfulness is too evident to be questioned; and Johnson is perhaps already better known by the pages of Boswell than by any of his own writings. Boswell died in London, June 19, 1795. Besides the works already mentioned, he was the author of one or two minor productions of temporary interest. In December, 1856, there was published a posthumous volume of *Letters of James Boswell*, addressed to the Rev. W. J. Temple, from the original MSS., in which the gay, careless character of the man very strongly appears.

LORD MACAULAY'S ESSAY

ON

BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON.

[N.B.—The introductory portion of the Essay containing a severe critique on Mr. Croker's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is omitted, as it has nothing of permanent interest.]

THE Life of Johnson is assuredly a great—a very great work. Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second. He has distanced⁵ all his competitors so decidedly that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.

We are not sure that there is in the whole history of the human intellect so strange a phenomenon as this book. Many of the greatest men that ever lived have written biography.¹⁰ Boswell was one of the smallest men that ever lived, and he has beaten them all. He was, if we are to give any credit to his own account, or to the united testimony of all who knew him, a man of the meanest and feeblest intellect. Johnson described him as a fellow who had missed his only chance of¹⁵

2. Homer. Who?

2. Shakespeare. Who?

3. Demosthenes. Who?

7. Eclipse is first. This famous race-horse, the fleetest after Flying Childers, was bred by the Duke of Cumberland. His name was taken from the great eclipse of 1764, the year of his birth. He was never beaten.

immortality by not having been alive when the *Dunciad* was written. Beauclerk used his name as a proverbial expression for a bore. He was the laughing-stock of the whole of that brilliant society which has owed to him the greater part of its fame. He was always laying himself at the feet of some eminent man, and begging to be spit upon and trampled upon. He was always earning some ridiculous nickname, and then "binding it as a crown unto him," not merely in metaphor, but literally. He exhibited himself, at the Shakespeare Jubilee, to all the crowd which filled Stratford-on-Avon, with a placard round his hat bearing the inscription of *Corsica Boswell*. In his *Tour* he proclaimed to all the world that at Edinburgh he was known by the appellation of *Paoli Boswell*. Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride, and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London; so curious to know everybody who was talked about, that, Tory and High Churchman as he was, he maneuvered, we have been told, for an introduction to Tom Paine; so vain of the most

1. **When the *Dunciad* was written.** Describes a contest for the crown of dullness. Three books were published by Pope in 1727; the first complete edition in 1729.

2. **Beauclerk.** Topham B., one of the St. Alban's family, a gay and dissipated, but clever man, of sharp wit and courtly manners, with whom Dr. Johnson contracted a strange but honorable friendship.

8. **Binding it as a crown.**—*Job* xxxi. 36.

9. **Shakespeare Jubilee.** Held at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769. For an account of it see CHAMBERS' *Book of Days*, vol. i. p. 590.

13. **Paoli Boswell.** In 1768 Boswell published an *Account of Corsica, with a Journal of a Tour to that Island*. He was ever boring Dr. Johnson with descriptions of his travels, and the doctor bids him more than once "empty his head of Corsica." General Paoli, a close friend of Boswell, was proclaimed chief of Corsica in 1755, and successfully sustained the struggle against the Genoese. He also reorganized the administration and government of the island. On the Genoese ceding Corsica to France in 1768 he resisted, but was beaten by the Count de Vaux, and took refuge in England.

18. **Tories.** A political party in England of the reign of Charles I. and II., about the middle of the seventeenth century. Those who supported the king were called Tories, and the advocates of popular rights and parliamentary power over the crown were called Whigs.

20. **Thomas Paine.** Born in England 1737, died 1809. Began life as a corsetmaker; afterwards obtained a post in the Excise; then was usher in a London school. In 1775 he went to America, where he gained fame and popularity by writing in favor of the liberty of the colonies. He was appointed Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and sent to France to negotiate a loan, in which he succeeded, and on his return was welcomed with enthusiasm. Returning to England, he published in 1791 his *Rights of Man*, and in con-

childish distinctions, that when he had been to court, he drove to the office where his book was printing, without changing his clothes, and summoned all the printer's devils to admire his new ruffles and sword. Such was this man, and such he was content and proud to be. Everything which another man would have hidden, everything the publication of which would have made another man hang himself, was matter of gay and clamorous exultation to his weak and diseased mind.

What silly things he said, what bitter retorts he provoked ; how at one place he was troubled with evil presentiments ¹⁰ which came to nothing ; how at another place, on waking from a drunken doze, he read the Prayer-book, and took a hair of the dog that had bitten him ; how he went to see men hanged, and came away maudlin ; how he added five hundred pounds to the fortune of one of his babies because she was not ¹⁵ frightened at Johnson's ugly face ; how he was frightened out of his wits at sea, and how the sailors quieted him as they would have quieted a child ; how tipsy he was at Lady Cork's one evening, and how much his merriment annoyed the ladies ; how impertinent he was to the Duchess of Argyle, and with ²⁰ what stately contempt she put down his impertinence ; how Colonel Macleod sneered to his face at his impudent obtrusiveness ; how his father and the very wife of his bosom laughed and fretted at his fooleries ; all these things he proclaimed to all the world, as if they had been subjects for pride and osten- ²⁵ tious rejoicing. All the caprices of his temper, all the illusions of his vanity, all his hypochondriac whimsies, all his

sequence was prosecuted before the Court of King's Bench. He fled to France, where he was welcomed with open arms, and chosen as a representative in the Convention by the department of the Pas-de-Calais. He drew on himself the displeasure of Robespierre by voting for the banishment, and not the death, of the king. His name was struck off the list of members, and he was thrown into prison. In 1794 he took his place again in the Assembly, but shortly after returned to America. He is now known chiefly by his *Age of Reason*, a work in which he decries all existing religions, and advocates a pure Deism.

14. **Maudlin.** "And think you that the Magdalen could have ever given us 'maudlin' in its present contemptuous application, if the tears of penitential weeping had been held in due honor by the world?"—TRENCH, *Study of Words*.

27. **Hypochondriac.** From Gr. *ὑποχόνδριον*, the part under the *χόνδρος* or cartilage of the breast-bone; the supposed seat of nervous affections.

castles in the air, he displayed with a cool self-complacency, a perfect unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself, to which it is impossible to find a parallel in the whole history of mankind. He has used many people ill; but assuredly he has used nobody so ill as himself.

That such a man should have written one of the best books in the world is strange enough. But this is not all. Many persons who have conducted themselves foolishly in active life, and whose conversation has indicated no superior powers of mind, have left us valuable works. Goldsmith was very justly described by one of his contemporaries as an inspired idiot, and by another as a being

“Who wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll.”

La Fontaine was in society a mere simpleton. His blunders would not come in amiss among the stories of Hierocles. But these men attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer. Without all the qualities which made him the jest

10. **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774). A poet and prose writer. His *Traveller* (1764) established his reputation. Of *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) Johnson said he knew of no comedy for many years that has answered so much the great end of comedy—making an audience merry. His *Vicar of Wakefield* is considered the most exquisite of all romances in miniature.

11. “Inspired idiot.” By Horace Walpole.

13. “Who wrote like an angel,” etc. Goldsmith, one evening at the St. James’s Coffee-house, proposed that he and Garrick should each write epitaphs on the other. Garrick agreed, and at once produced the following:

“Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
Who wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll.”

Goldsmith replied by his poem *Retaliation*.

14. **La Fontaine**. Born 1621, died 1695. The butt of his contemporaries Molière, Boileau, Racine, by whom he was nicknamed *Le bonhomme*. A *mot* of Mme. de la Sablière (La Fontaine’s Mrs. Thrale) is well known: “En vérité, mon cher La Fontaine, vous seriez bien bête, si vous n’aviez pas tant d’esprit.”

15. **Hierocles**. A late Greek author, who composed a book of witticisms, under the title of *Philogelos*. A free translation of the jests of Hierocles, with an introduction, was one of Dr. Johnson’s earliest works.

17. **Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses**. This paradox has been admirably refuted by Carlyle in his review of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* in *Fraser’s Magazine*, May, 1832: “Nay, sometimes a strange enough hypothesis has been started of him; as if it were in virtue even of these same bad qualities that he did his good work, as if it were the very fact of his being among the worst men in the world that had enabled him to write one of the best books therein! Falsely hypothesis, we may venture to say, never rose in human soul. Bad is by its nature negative, and can do nothing; whatsoever enables us to do anything is by its nature good.”

and the torment of those among whom he lived, without the officiousness, the inquisitiveness, the effrontery, the toad-eating, the insensibility to all reproof, he never could have produced so excellent a book. He was a slave proud of his servitude; a Paul Pry, convinced that his own curiosity and garrulity were virtues; an unsafe companion who never scrupled to repay the most liberal hospitality by the basest violation of confidence; a man without delicacy, without shame, without sense enough to know when he was hurting the feelings of others, or when he was exposing himself to derision; and because he was all this, he has, in an important department of literature, immeasurably surpassed such writers as Tacitus, Clarendon, Alfieri, and his own idol, Johnson.

Of the talents which ordinarily raise men to eminence as writers, Boswell had absolutely none. There is not in all his books a single remark of his own on literature, politics, religion, or society, which is not either commonplace or absurd. His dissertations on hereditary gentility, on the slave-trade, and on the entailing of landed estates, may serve as examples. To say that these passages are sophistical would be to pay them an extravagant compliment. They have no pretense to argument, or even to meaning. He has reported innumerable observations made by himself in the course of conversation. Of those observations we do not remember one which is above

2. **Toad-eating.** A toad-eater was originally the assistant to a mountebank; hence by contraction toady.

5. **Paul Pry.** The chief character in the comedy of the same name by John Poole. He is one of those idle, meddling fellows who, having no employment themselves, are perpetually interfering in other people's affairs.

12. **Immeasurably surpassed such authors as Tacitus, etc.** An obvious exaggeration. The four named, though all in a sense biographers, differ so entirely in their style and scope that there can be no just comparison between them and Boswell. Boswell's *Life* would be more fitly compared with such works as St. Simon's *Mémoires*, Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe*, Pepys' *Diary*. Tacitus wrote the *Life of Agricola*; Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* is rather in the form of memoirs than regular history; Alfieri wrote a history of his own life; Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, *Life of Savage*, *Sir T. Browne*, and many others.

13. **Tacitus.** The great Roman historian, in his "Life of Agricola."

13. **Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon** (1608-1674). An English historian and statesman; wrote "History of the Great Rebellion," which is rather in the form of memoirs than regular history.

13. **Alfieri.** An Italian poet (1749-1803).

the intellectual capacity of a boy of fifteen. He has printed many of his own letters, and in these letters he is alternating or twaddling. Logic, eloquence, wit, taste, all the things which are generally considered as making a book valuable, were utterly wanting to him. He had, indeed, a quick observation and a retentive memory. These qualities, if he had been a man of sense and virtue, would scarcely of themselves have sufficed to make him conspicuous; but as he was a dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb, they have made him immortal.

Those parts of his book which, considered abstractedly, are most utterly worthless, are delightful when we read them as illustrations of the character of the writer. Bad in themselves, they are good dramatically, like the nonsense of Justice Shallow, the clipped English of Dr. Caius, or the misplaced consonants of Fluellen. Of all confessors, Boswell is the most candid. Other men who have pretended to lay open their own hearts, Rousseau, for example, and Lord Byron, have evidently written with a constant view to effect, and are to be then most distrusted when they seem to be most sincere. There is scarcely any man who would not rather accuse himself of great crimes and of dark and tempestuous passions than proclaim all his little vanities and wild fancies. It would be easier to find a person who would avow actions like those of Cæsar Borgia or Danton, than one who would publish a

15. **Justice Shallow.** From Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

15. **Dr. Caius.** The French physician in the same play.

16. **Fluellen.** The Welsh captain in *Henry V.*

18. **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778). A celebrated Swiss philosopher and writer. His early career presents a series of bizarre adventures, absurd vagaries, and surprising vicissitudes, of which he has given an extremely candid and unreserved narrative in his *Confessions*.

18. **Lord Byron.** In his correspondence and diaries, which he left to be published by Thomas Moore.

25. **Cæsar Borgia.** The natural son of Roderic Borgia (afterwards Pope, under the title of Alexander VI.), represented by Machiavelli as the model of a tyrant, notorious for the cruelty and perfidy he employed in subduing the independent towns of the Romagna, no less than for his domestic crimes and debaucheries. He is said to have assassinated his elder brother, and lived in incest with his sister, the infamous Lucretia Borgia.

25. **Danton.** The foremost man during the first half of the French Revolution. He helped to establish the Revolutionary Tribunal. 10th March, 1793, and the Committee of Public Safety. 6th April, 1793. Remember his famous "Jetons-leur en défi une tête de roi," and "De l'audace, de l'audace, toujours de l'audace." He was guillotined by Robespierre, April 5th, 1794.

day-dream like those of Alnaschar and Malvolio. Those weaknesses which most men keep covered up in the most secret places of the mind, not to be disclosed to the eye of friendship or of love, were precisely the weaknesses which Boswell paraded before all the world. He was perfectly frank, because the weakness of his understanding and the tumult of his spirits prevented him from knowing when he made himself ridiculous. His book resembles nothing so much as the conversation of the inmates of the Palace of Truth.

His fame is great; and it will, we have no doubt, belasting; but it is fame of a peculiar kind, and indeed marvelously resembles infamy. We remember no other case in which the world has made so great a distinction between a book and its author. In general the book and the author are considered as one. To admire the book is to admire the author. The case of Boswell is an exception, we think the only exception, to this rule. His work is universally allowed to be interesting, instructive, eminently original: yet it has brought him nothing but contempt. All the world reads it: all the world delights in it: yet we do not remember ever to have read or ever to have heard any expression of respect and admiration for the man to whom we owe so much instruction and amusement. While edition after edition of his book was coming forth, his son, as Mr. Croker tells us, was ashamed of it, and hated to hear it mentioned. This feeling was natural and reasonable. Sir Alexander saw that in proportion to the celebrity of the work was the degradation of the author. The very editors of this unfortunate gentleman's books have forgotten their allegiance, and, like those Puritan casuists who

1. **Alnaschar.** See *The Arabian Nights* "History of the Barber's Fifth Brother," and Addison's *Spectator*, No. 535.

1. **Malvolio.** Olivia's amorous steward in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

9. **The Palace of Truth.** A tale of Madame de Genlis, which has been often dramatized, and within the last few years by Gilbert. It is a charmed palace, where every one is compelled against his will to speak the truth.

24. **Croker.** Publisher of the "Life of Johnson."

29. **Like those Puritan casuists.** "They not only declared that they fought for the king, but that the raising and maintaining soldiers for their own army would be an acceptable service for the king, parliament, and kingdom."—CLARENDON. "For as we make war for the king against himself," etc.—*Hudibras*.

took arms by the authority of the king against his person, have attacked the writer while doing homage to the writings. Mr. Croker, for example, has published two thousand five hundred notes on the life of Johnson, and yet scarcely ever
5 mentions the biographer whose performance he has taken such pains to illustrate without some expression of contempt.

An ill-natured man Boswell certainly was not. Yet the malignity of the most malignant satirist could scarcely cut deeper than his thoughtless loquacity. Having himself no
10 sensibility to derision and contempt, he took it for granted that all others were equally callous. He was not ashamed to exhibit himself to the whole world as a common spy, a common tattler, a humble companion without the excuse of poverty, and to tell a hundred stories of his own pertness and
15 folly, and of the insults which his pertness and folly brought upon him. It was natural that he should show little discretion in cases in which the feelings or the honor of others might be concerned. No man, surely, ever published such stories respecting persons whom he professed to love and
20 revere. He would infallibly have made his hero as contemptible as he has made himself, had not his hero really possessed some moral and intellectual qualities of a very high order. The best proof that Johnson was really an extraordinary man is that his character, instead of being degraded, has, on the
25 whole, been decidedly raised by a work in which all his vices and weaknesses are exposed more unsparingly than they ever were exposed by Churchill or by Kenrick.

Johnson grown old, Johnson in the fullness of his fame and in the enjoyment of a competent fortune, is better known to
30 us than any other man in history. Everything about him, his coat, his wig, his figure, his face, his scrofula, his St. Vitus's

27. **Churchill.** Born 1731, died 1764. His fame as a poet rests chiefly on the *Rosciad*, a bitter contemporary satire, in which Dr. Johnson figures. "He talked very contemptuously of Churchill's poetry, observing that 'it had a temporary currency only from its audacity of abuse, and being filled with living names, and that it would sink into oblivion.'"

27. **Kenrick.** "His (Johnson's) *Shakespeare* was virulently attacked by Mr. William Kenrick, who obtained the degree of LL.D. from a Scotch University, and wrote for the booksellers in a great variety of branches."

dance, his rolling walk, his blinking eye, the outward signs which too clearly marked his approbation of his dinner, his insatiable appetite for fish-sauce and veal-pie with plums, his inextinguishable thirst for tea, his trick of touching the posts as he walked, his mysterious practice of treasuring up scraps of orange-peel, his morning slumbers, his midnight disputations, his contortions, his mutterings, his gruntings, his puffings, his vigorous, acute, and ready eloquence, his sarcastic wit, his vehemence, his insolence, his fits of tempestuous rage, his queer inmates, old Mr. Levett and blind Mrs. Williams, the cat Hodge and the negro Frank, all are as familiar to us as the objects by which we have been surrounded from childhood. But we have no minute information respecting those years of Johnson's life during which his character and his manners became immutably fixed. We know him, not as he was known to the men of his own generation, but as he was known to men whose father he might have been. That celebrated club of which he was the most distinguished member contained few persons who could remember a time when his fame was not fully established and his habits completely formed. He had made himself a name

10. **Old Mr. Levett.** "An obscure practiser in physic among the lower people." "Ever since I was acquainted with Dr. Johnson, and many years before, as I have been assured by those who knew him earlier, Mr. Levett had an apartment in his house or his chambers, and waited upon him every morning through the whole course of his late and tedious breakfast."—MADAME PIOZZI, vol. i. p. 193.

11. **Mrs. Williams.** "Mrs. Anna W., daughter of a very ingenious Welsh physician, and a woman of more than ordinary talents and literature, having come to London in hopes of being cured of a cataract in both her eyes, which afterwards ended in total blindness, was kindly received as a constant visitor at his house while Mrs. Johnson lived."—BOSWELL'S *Life*. (1751.)

His cat Hodge. "I shall never forget the indulgence with which he treated Hodge, his cat; for whom he himself used to go out and buy oysters, lest the servants having that trouble should take a dislike to the poor creature."—*Ibid.* (1783)

The negro Frank. Francis Barber, his faithful servant, to whom he left an annuity of £70. He was born in Jamaica, and brought to England in 1750. He entered Dr. Johnson's service in 1752, and with the exception of two short intervals, continued in it till his master's death.

18. **That celebrated club.** The club, at first without a name, which after Garrick's death was called The Literary Club. Sir Joshua Reynolds was the first promoter, in 1764, and the original members were Sir J. Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, Edmund Burke, Goldsmith, Nugent, Beauclerk, Langton, Chamier, and Sir John Hawkins. They met at the Turk's Head, Gerard Street, Soho.

in literature while Reynolds and the Wartons were still boys. He was about twenty years older than Burke, Goldsmith, and Gerard Hamilton, about thirty years older than Gibbon, Beauclerk, and Langton, and about forty years older than Lord Stowell, Sir William Jones, and Windham. Boswell and Mrs. Thrale, the two writers from whom we derive most of our knowledge respecting him, never saw him till long after he was fifty years old, till most of his great works had become classical, and till the pension bestowed on him by the Crown had placed him above poverty. Of those eminent men who were his most intimate associates towards the close of his life, the only one, as far as we remember, who knew him during the first ten or twelve years of his residence in the capital, was David Garrick; and it does not appear that during those years David Garrick saw much of his fellow-townsmen.

1. **Sir Joshua Reynolds** (1723-1792). The most celebrated portrait-painter that England has produced. He founded in 1764 with Dr. Johnson, his intimate friend, the Literary Club. "Sir Joshua Reynolds is the most invulnerable man I know," said Johnson; "the man with whom if you should quarrel you will find the most difficulty how to abuse."

The Wartons. Joseph, born 1722, head master of Winchester College. Thomas, born 1728, author of *History of English Poetry*, and editor of *Milton*.

2. **Burke.** See note 2, p. 28.

3. **Gerard Hamilton.** Born 1728-9. Commonly known by the name of Single-speech Hamilton. In 1754 he was elected M.P. for Petersfield, and on November 13, 1755, in a debate on an address of thanks, he made his famous speech.

Gibbon. Born 1737, died 1794. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published 1776-88. Johnson occasionally met Gibbon, but, as might be expected, they had little in common.

4. **Beauclerk.** A contemporary of Langton at Trinity College, Oxford. Note 2, p. 10.

Langton. Bennet L., of Langton, in Lincolnshire. "Langton, Sir, has a grant of free warren from Henry the Second, and Cardinal Stephen Langton, in King John's reign, was of his family."

5. **Lord Stowell.** Sir W. Scott, elder brother of Lord Chancellor Eldon, one of the greatest of English lawyers. Born 1745.

Sir William Jones. See note 4, p. 28.

Windham. William W., the great parliamentary orator, the friend of Burke. Born 1750.

Boswell and Mrs. Thrale, etc. Boswell was first introduced to him when he was in his fifty-fifth year. To Mrs. Thrale he was first introduced in his fifty-seventh year. She published *Anecdotes of Dr. Johnson*, and letters to and from Dr. Johnson by Hester Lynch Piozzi. (After Mr. Thrale's death she married Signor Piozzi.) "Mrs. Thrale, a bright papilionaceous creature, whom the elephant loved to play with, and wave to and fro with his trunk."—CARLYLE.

9. **The pension.** When he was fifty-three a pension of £300 a year was conferred on him by George III., through the Earl of Bute, then Prime Minister.

14. **David Garrick.** In 1737 he travelled to London in company with

Johnson came up to London precisely at the time when the condition of a man of letters was most miserable and degraded. It was a dark night between two sunny days. The age of the Mæcenases had passed away. The age of general curiosity and intelligence had not arrived. The number of readers is at present so great that a popular author may subsist in comfort and opulence on the profits of his works. In the reigns of William III., of Anne, and of George I., even such men as Congreve and Addison would scarcely have been able to live like gentlemen by the mere sale of their writings. But the deficiency of the natural demand for literature was, at the close of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, more than made up by artificial encouragement, by a vast system of bounties and premiums. There was, perhaps, never a time at which the rewards of literary merit were so splendid, at which men who could write well found such easy admittance into the most distinguished society, and to the highest honors of the state. The chiefs of both the great parties into which the kingdom was divided patronized literature with emulous munificence. Congreve, when he had scarcely attained his majority, was rewarded for his first comedy with places which made him independent for life. Smith, though his *Hippolytus* and *Phædra* failed, would have

Garrick, his fellow-townsmen, and one of his pupils at Edial. Whilst he was himself earning a bare subsistence as a literary hack, he naturally felt some jealousy at the brilliant and rapid success of his pupil.

4. **Mæcenas.** A celebrated patron of literature at Rome, born about 70 B.C.

9. **Congreve** brought out his first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*, in 1693, when he was in his twenty-fourth year, and made at once his fame and fortune. Pope dedicated to him his *Iliad*, and Dryden spoke of him as his successor and the guardian of his reputation.

“ In him all beauties of this age we see,
 Etheredge his courtship, Southern's purity,
 The satire, wit, and strength of Wycherley.”

Dr. Johnson preferred a passage in Congreve's *Mourning Bride* to any in Shakespeare.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719). His literary fame rests chiefly on his contributions to the periodical publications *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and *The Guardian*. Dr. Johnson has said of him: “ Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.”

23. **Edmund Smith.** One of Johnson's fifty poets, a Westminster scholar, and a man of some learning, though an indifferent poet. *Phædra* and *Hippolytus* was brought out in 1707. Addison wrote the prologue, and

been consoled with three hundred a year but for his own folly. Rowe was not only poet-laureate, but also land-surveyor of the Customs in the port of London, clerk of the council to the Prince of Wales, and secretary of the Presentations to the Lord Chancellor. Hughes was secretary to the Commissions of the Peace. Ambrose Philips was judge of the Prerogative Court in Ireland. Locke was Commissioner of Appeals and of the Board of Trade. Newton was Master of the Mint. Stepney and Prior were employed in embassies of high dignity and importance. Gay, who commenced life as apprentice to a silk mercer, became a secretary of Legation at five-and-

Betterton and Booth both acted in it, but it fell flat. Lord Halifax accepted the dedication of the tragedy, and was prepared to reward the author with a place of £300 a year, but Smith lost it through his indolence in attending his patron.

2. **Nicholas Rowe.** Born 1673, died 1718. Of his tragedies, the best known are *Jane Shore* and *The Fair Penitent*. He was a careful student of the Elizabethan dramatists, whom he often recalls by his tenderness and pathos. One character in *The Fair Penitent*, "the gay Lothario," has passed into a common name.

5. **John Hughes.** One of Johnson's fifty poets. Born at Marlborough, 1677. Dr. Johnson mentions as a report that it was he who persuaded Addison to finish his *Cato*. Chancellor Cowper made him secretary to the commission of the peace. His principal work was a tragedy, *The Siege of Damascus*.

6. **Ambrose Philips.** Born 1675, died 1749. The author of *Pastorals*, ridiculed by Pope, who nicknamed him *Namby Fambly*; and of three tragedies, the best known of which, the *Distressed Mother*, is borrowed from Racine's *Andromaque*.

7. **John Locke.** Born 1632, died 1704. After sharing the fortunes and the fall of his patron, Shaftesbury Locke returned to England in 1688, in the same fleet which conveyed Queen Mary. He was appointed a member of the Council of Trade, in which post he materially aided Somers in the conversion of the currency.—See MACAULAY'S *History*, vol. iv. p. 630.

8. **Newton.** "The important office of Warder of the Mint, worth between six and seven hundred pounds a year, had become a mere sinecure, and had been filled by a succession of fine gentlemen, who were well known at the hazard table of Whitehall, but who never condescended to come near the Tower. This office had just become vacant [March, 1695-6], and Montague had obtained it for Newton. The ability, the industry, and the strict uprightness of the great philosopher speedily produced a complete revolution throughout the department which was under his direction."—MACAULAY'S *History*, vol. iv. p. 703.

9. **George Stepney.** Born 1663, died 1707. "It is reported that the juvenile compositions of Stepney made gray authors blush. I know not whether his poems will appear such wonders to the present age."—JOHNSON'S *Lives of the Poets*.

Matthew Prior. Born 1664, died 1721; educated at Westminster, and St. John's College, Cambridge, where he was maintained by the generosity of Lord Dorset. His first work was the *City and Country Mouse*, a parody on Dryden's *Hind and Panther*, which he composed with Montague.

10. **John Gay.** Born 1688, died 1732. The first work which brought him into notice was the *Shepherd's Week*, a set of seven pastorals written as a parody of Ambrose Philips.

twenty. It was to a poem on the *Death of Charles II.*, and to the *City and Country Mouse*, that Montague owed his introduction into public life, his earldom, his garter, and his auditorship of the Exchequer. Swift, but for the unconquerable prejudice of the queen, would have been a bishop. Oxford, with his white staff in his hand, passed through the crowd of his suitors to welcome Parnell, when that ingenious writer deserted the Whigs. Steele was a commissioner of stamps and a member of Parliament. Arthur Mainwaring was a commissioner of the Customs and auditor of the impost. Tickell was secretary to the Lords Justices of Ireland. Addison was secretary of state.

This liberal patronage was brought into fashion, as it seems, by the magnificent Dorset, who alone of all the noble versifiers in the court of Charles II. possessed talents for composition which would have made him eminent without the aid of

2. **Charles Montague**, Earl of Halifax. A friend and fellow-student of Prior, was originally educated for the church, but obtained, by the influence of Dorset, a seat in the House of Commons.

4. **Swift**. Though caressed and flattered by the Tory party, to whom he had deserted, Swift never succeeded in obtaining any other preferment than the deanery of St. Patrick; and his failure in obtaining an English bishopric, on which he had set his heart, embittered the last half of his life.

7. **Thomas Parnell**. Born 1679, died 1717. An Irish clergyman, principally remembered by his poem the *Hermit*. His first connections were with the Whigs, and he numbered Addison, Congreve, and Steele among his friends.

8. **Sir Richard Steele**. Born 1671, died 1729. The originator of, and, next to Addison, the principal contributor to the *Spectator*. "He outlived his places, his schemes, his wife, his income, his health, and almost everything but his kind heart"—THACKERAY, *English Humorists*.

9. **Arthur Mainwaring**. Born 1668, died 1712. A powerful political writer and satirist.

10. **The impost**. Money advanced out of the Treasury for public works, etc. In law Latin "*de præstito*."

11. **Thomas Tickell**. Born 1686, died 1740. A friend of Addison, whose collected works he published, and a contributor to the *Spectator*. He was taken to Ireland by Addison, when the latter went over as secretary to Lord Sunderland.

12. **Addison**. In April, 1717, Sunderland became Secretary of State, and made Addison his colleague. His declining health obliged him to resign the post which he had held for less than a year.

14. **The magnificent Dorset**. Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset. "Such a patron of letters England had never seen. His bounty was bestowed with equal judgment and liberality, and was confined to no sect or faction. Men of genius, estranged from each other by literary jealousy or by difference of political opinion, joined in acknowledging his impartial kindness. The munificent Earl might, if such had been his wish, have been the rival of those of whom he was content to be the benefactor."—MACAULAY'S *History*, vol. ii. p. 321.

a coronet. Montague owed his elevation to the favor of Dorset, and imitated through the whole course of his life the liberality to which he was himself so greatly indebted. The Tory leaders, Harley and Bolingbroke in particular, vied with the chiefs of the Whig party in zeal for the encouragement of letters. But soon after the accession of the house of Hanover a change took place. The supreme power passed to a man who cared little for poetry or eloquence. The importance of the House of Commons was constantly on the increase. The Government was under the necessity of bartering for Parliamentary support much of that patronage which had been employed in fostering literary merit; and Walpole was by no means inclined to divert any part of the fund of corruption to purposes which he considered as idle. He had eminent talents for Government and for debate. But he had paid little attention to books, and felt little respect for authors. One of the coarse jokes of his friend Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was far more pleasing to him than Thomson's *Seasons* or Richardson's *Pamela*. He had observed that some of the distinguished writers whom the favor of Halifax had turned into statesmen had been mere encumbrances to their party, dawd-

4. **Harley and Bolingbroke.** Robert Harley, created Earl of Oxford, and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, both began life as Whigs, and both deserted to the Tories. When Marlborough fell from power, Harley was made a Commissioner of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Under their ministry the peace of Utrecht was concluded. Soon after they quarreled, and Swift in vain tried to patch up the difference. Bolingbroke's influence prevailed, but his triumph was short-lived. The death of Queen Anne restored the Whigs to power. Both statesmen were impeached. Bolingbroke fled, and Harley was committed to the Tower.

To St. John Pope addressed his *Essay on Man*; and his *Epistle*, sent to the Earl of Oxford with Parnell's poems, is hardly less famous than the essay.

12. **Walpole.** On the accession of George I. a new ministry was formed under Lord Townsend, with Sir Robert Walpole as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

17. **Sir Charles Hanbury Williams.** A poet and wit, one of the famous coterie to which Horace Walpole, Henry Fox, Lord Hervey, and Sir Robert Walpole belonged.

18. **Thomson's Seasons.** The first part, *Winter*, was published in 1726, the complete work in 1730. Thomson dedicated an early poem to Sir Robert, with a highly adulatory preface. Finding that no pension or sinecure followed, he withdrew the preface in later editions, and threw himself into the party of opposition.

19. **Richardson's Pamela.** Richardson's first novel, published in 1741. Its popularity was such that five editions were exhausted in one year.

20. **Halifax.** An English statesman, born 1630, died 1695.

lers in office and mutes in Parliament. During the whole course of his administration, therefore, he scarcely befriended a single man of genius. The best writers of the age gave all their support to the opposition, and contributed to excite that discontent which, after plunging the nation into a foolish and unjust war, overthrew the minister to make room for men less able and equally unscrupulous. The opposition could reward its eulogists with little more than promises and caresses. St. James's would give nothing; Leicester House had nothing to give.

Thus at the time when Johnson commenced his literary career, a writer had little to hope from the patronage of powerful individuals. The patronage of the public did not yet furnish the means of comfortable subsistence. The prices paid by booksellers to authors were so low, that a man of considerable talents and unremitting industry could do little more than provide for the day which was passing over him. The lean kine had eaten up the fat kine. The thin and withered ears had devoured the good ears. The season of rich harvests was over, and the period of famine had begun. All that is squalid and miserable might now be summed up in the word Poet. That word denoted a creature dressed like a scarecrow, familiar with compters and sponging-houses, and perfectly qualified to decide on the comparative merits of

3. **The best writers of the age, etc.** In 1717 Lord Townsend was dismissed, and Lord Stanhope became First Minister.

9. **St. James's.** The usual designation of the British court. So called from the old palace of St. James.

Leicester House. In 1717 occurred the final breach between George I. and the Prince of Wales. The Prince was ordered to quit St. James's, and afterward resided at Leicester House.

21. **All that is squalid and miserable.** "But the sufferings of the poet in other countries is nothing when compared to his distresses here; the names of Spenser and Otway, Butler and Dryden, are every day mentioned as a national reproach: some of them lived in a state of precarious indigence, and others literally died of hunger."—GOLDSMITH'S *Citizen of the World*.

23. **Compters.** Debtors' prisons. The Giltspur Street Compter existed within the memory of the present generation.

Sponging-houses. "Sponging-house, a house to which debtors are taken before commitment to prison, where the bailiffs sponge upon them, or riot at their cost."—JOHNSON'S *Dictionary*.

Compare also Goldsmith's famous description of the poet Scroggen:

"There in a lonely room, from bailiffs snug,
The muse found Scroggen stretched beneath a rug."

the Common Side in the King's Bench prison and of Mount Scoundrel in the Fleet. Even the poorest pitied him; and they well might pity him. For if their condition was equally abject, their aspirings were not equally high, nor their sense of insult equally acute. (To lodge in a garret up four pair of stairs, to dine in a cellar among footmen out of place, to translate ten hours a day for the wages of a ditcher, to be hunted by bailiffs from one haunt of beggary and pestilence to another, from Grub Street to St. George's Fields, and from St. George's Fields to the alleys behind St. Martin's Church; to sleep on a bulk in June and amidst the ashes of a glass-house in December; to die in a hospital, and to be buried in a parish vault, was the fate of more than one writer who, if he had lived thirty years earlier, would have been admitted to the sittings of the Kitcat or the Scriblerus Club, would have sat in Parliament, and would have been entrusted with embassies to the High Allies; who, if he had lived in our time, would have received from the booksellers several hundred pounds a year.

As every climate has its peculiar diseases, so every walk of life has its peculiar temptations. The literary character, as-

1. **The Common Side, Mount Scoundrel.** Parts of the Fleet Prison. Mount Scoundrel was the name given to some wretched garrets on the common side. The Fleet Prison was abolished in 1844, having existed more than two centuries.

9. **Grub Street.** "Originally the name of a street near Moorfields in London, much inhabited by the writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems: whence any mean production is called *grubstreet*."—JOHNSON'S *Dictionary*. The street is now called Milton Street.

Most of the touches in this picture are taken from JOHNSON'S *Life of Savage*. "On a bulk in a cellar, or in a glass house among thieves and beggars, was to be found the author of the *Wanderer*, the man of exalted sentiments, extensive views, and curious observation."

15. **The Kitcat Club** met at a mutton-pie house in Shire Lane, near Temple Bar, kept by a Christopher Cat. Here Jacob Tonson, the bookseller, used once a week to entertain his clients and friends. About the year 1700 this gathering of wits produced a club partly literary and partly political, in which the great Whig chiefs were associated with the principal Whig writers. Tonson built a room for the club at Barn Elms, which was furnished with the portraits of all the members, painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller, himself a member. The pictures were on a new-sized canvas adapted to the height of the walls, whence the name kitcat came to be applied to a three-quarter length portrait. See *Spectator*, No. 9, with note by H. Morley.

The Scriblerus Club. Founded by Swift, together with Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot. The famous *Miscellanies* were the joint production of the club, as were also the prolegomena and variorum notes to the *Dunciad*. For a curious story of Swift's relation to the club see GOLDSMITH'S *Life of Parnell*.

surely, has always had its share of faults, vanity, jealousy, morbid sensibility. To these faults were now superadded all the faults which are commonly found in men whose livelihood is precarious, and whose principles are exposed to the trial of severe distress. All the vices of the gambler and of the beggar were blended with those of the author. The prizes in the wretched lottery of book-making were scarcely less ruinous than the blanks. If good fortune came, it came in such a manner that it was almost certain to be abused. After months of starvation and despair, a full third night or a well-received dedication filled the pocket of the lean, ragged, unwashed poet with guineas. He hastened to enjoy those luxuries with the images of which his mind had been haunted while he was sleeping amidst the cinders, and eating potatoes at the Irish ordinary in Shoe Lane. A week of taverns soon qualified him for another year of night-cellars. Such was the life of Savage, of Boyse, and of a crowd of others. Sometimes blazing in gold-laced hats and waistcoats; sometimes lying in bed because their coats had gone to pieces, or wearing paper cravats because their linen was in pawn; sometimes drinking champagne and tokay with Betty Careless; sometimes standing at the window of an eating-house in Porridge Island, to snuff up the scent of what they could not afford to taste; they knew luxury; they knew beggary; but they never knew comfort. These men were irreclaimable. They looked on a regular and frugal life with the same aversion which an old gypsy or a Mohawk hunter feels for a stationary abode, and for the restraint and securities of civilized communities. They were as untamable, as much wedded to their desolate freedom, as the wild ass. They could no more

17. **Savage.** An English poet. See note 9, p. 24.

Boyse. "Among the early associates of Johnson at St. John's Gate was Samuel Boyse, well known by his ingenious productions, and not less noted for his imprudence. It was not unusual for Boyse to be a customer to the pawnbroker. On one of these occasions Dr. Johnson collected a sum of money to redeem his friend's clothes, which in two days after were pawned again. 'The sum (said Johnson) was collected by sixpences at a time when to me sixpence was a serious consideration.'"—Note by JOHN NICHOLS in *BOSWELL'S Life*.

22 **Porridge Island.** "A mean street in London, filled with cook-shops for the convenience of the poorer inhabitants."

be broken in to the offices of social man than the unicorn could be trained to serve and abide by the crib. It was well if they did not, like beasts of a still fiercer race, tear the hands which ministered to their necessities. To assist them
 5 was impossible; and the most benevolent of mankind at length became weary of giving relief which was dissipated with the wildest profusion as soon as it had been received. If a sum was bestowed on the wretched adventurer, such as, properly
 10 husbanded, might have supplied him for six months, it was instantly spent in strange freaks of sensuality, and, before forty-eight hours had elapsed, the poet was again pestering all his acquaintance for twopence to get a plate of shin of beef at a subterraneous cookshop. If his friends gave him an
 15 asylum in their houses, those houses were forthwith turned into bagnios and taverns. All order was destroyed; all business was suspended. The most good-natured host began to repent of his eagerness to serve a man of genius in distress when he heard his guest roaring for fresh punch at five o'clock in the morning.

20 A few eminent writers were more fortunate. Pope had been raised above poverty by the active patronage which, in his youth, both the great political parties had extended to his *Homer*. Young had received the only pension ever bestowed, to the best of our recollection, by Sir Robert Walpole, as the
 25 reward of mere literary merit. One or two of the many poets who attached themselves to the opposition, Thomson, in particular, and Mallet, obtained, after much severe suffering, the

1. *Than the unicorn, etc.*—*Job* xxxix, 9, 10.

14. *If his friends gave him an asylum.* As, for instance, Lord Tyrconnel did to Savage.

20. *Pope had been raised, etc.* Pope's *Iliad* was published by subscription in 1720, when he was in his thirty-third year. He cleared by it more than £5000; and by investing this sum in annuities, he secured his future life from want.

23. *Young.* Author of *Night Thoughts*. Began life as a hanger-on of the Duke of Wharton, and all his life through was an indefatigable though not very successful hunter for preferment. The dedications of his poems are, even in that age, unequaled in fulsomeness. Several of them were inscribed to Sir Robert Walpole.

27. *Thomson.* See above, p. 22, l. 18.

28. *David Mallet.* Born 1700, died 1765. A friend of Thomson, in conjunction with whom he wrote the masque of *Alfred*, which contains the famous song, *Rule, Britannia.*"

means of subsistence from their political friends. Richardson, like a man of sense, kept his shop; and his shop kept him, which his novels, admirable as they are, would scarcely have done. But nothing could be more deplorable than the state even of the ablest men, who at that time depended for subsistence on their writings. Johnson, Collins, Fielding, and Thomson were certainly four of the most distinguished persons that England produced during the eighteenth century. It is well known that they were all four arrested for debt.

Into calamities and difficulties such as these Johnson plunged in his twenty-eighth year. From that time till he was three or four and fifty, we have little information respecting him; little, we mean, compared with the full and accurate information which we possess respecting his proceedings and habits towards the close of his life. He emerged at length from cocklofts and sixpenny ordinaries into the society of the polished and the opulent. His fame was established. A pension sufficient for his wants had been conferred on him; and he came forth to astonish a generation with which he had almost as little in common as with Frenchmen or Spaniards.

In his early years he had occasionally seen the great; but he had seen them as a beggar. He now came among them as a companion. The demand for amusement and instruction had, during the course of twenty years, been gradually increasing. The price of literary labor had risen; and those rising men of letters with whom Johnson was henceforth to associate were, for the most part, persons widely different

1. **Richardson** was nearly fifty when he turned author. Till then he had been known only as a successful printer and bookseller.

6. **Collins.** Born 1721, died 1756. After Gray, the greatest lyric poet of the eighteenth century. "Collins, who, while he studied to live, felt no evil but poverty, no sooner lived to study than his life was assailed by more dreadful calamities, disease and insanity."—JOHNSON'S *Lives*.

Fielding. Born 1707, died 1754. Educated at Eton, and afterwards at the University of Leyden, he found himself, on the death of his father, General Fielding, almost penniless, and supported himself by writing for the stage. His wife brought him a considerable fortune, which he quickly dissipated; and it was not till 1749, when he was appointed a London police magistrate, that he was in possession of a settled income.

22. In his early years he had occasionally seen the great, etc. By "his early years" Lord Macaulay means the first years of his London life.

from those who had walked about with him all night in the streets for want of a lodging. "Burke, Robertson, the Wartons, Gray, Mason, Gibbon, Adam Smith, Beattie, Sir William Jones, Goldsmith, and Churchill were the most distinguished writers of what may be called the second generation of the Johnsonian age. Of these men Churchill was the only one in whom we can trace the stronger lineaments of that character which, when Johnson first came up to London, was common among authors. Of the rest, scarcely any had felt to the pressure of severe poverty. All had been early admitted into the most respectable society on an equal footing. They were men of quite a different species from the dependents of Curll and Osborne.

2. Edmund Burke. An illustrious statesman, orator, and philanthropist (1730-1797). The most arduous and formidable undertaking of his life, the prosecution of Warren Hastings, was begun in 1786, and occupied the attention of the House for two sessions. He was a close friend of Johnson, who said of him: "No man of sense could meet Mr. Burke by accident under a gateway to avoid a shower without being convinced that he was the first man in England."

Robertson. Born 1721, died 1793. A Presbyterian minister, Principal of the University of Edinburgh, and Historiographer Royal for Scotland. His three great works are a *History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and King James VI.*, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V.*, and a *History of America*.

3. The Wartons. See above, page 18, note 1.

Gray. Author of *An Elegy in a Country Church-yard*. Born 1716, died 1771. Johnson had a mean opinion of Gray's poetry. "Sir, I do not think Gray a first-rate poet. He has not a bold imagination, nor much command of words. The obscurity in which he has involved himself will not persuade us that he is sublime."—BOSWELL, i. 342. (1763.) He and Johnson never met. See also p. 41, note 4.

William Mason. Born 1725, died 1797. Mason was the intimate friend and biographer of Gray, and ranked with Gray in Dr. Johnson's estimation.

Adam Smith. Born 1723, died 1790. Professor of Logic, and afterwards of Moral Philosophy, in the University of Glasgow. His *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* laid the foundation of the science of political economy.

Beattie. Born 1735, died 1803. Professor of Moral Philosophy in Marischal College, Aberdeen. He published in 1771 his celebrated poem *The Minstrel*, which describes in the Spenserian stanza the inner life of a young village poet.

4. Sir William Jones. Born 1746, died 1794. A famous Orientalist, who by pointing out the connection of Sanskrit and Latin and Greek laid the foundation of philology.

Churchill began life as a clergyman, but was obliged to resign his preferment owing to his irregularities. His violent literary quarrels, his virulent satire, and his dissipation all mark him as belonging to the first rather than the last half of the eighteenth century. See above, p. 16.

13. Curll and Osborne. Edmund Curll, an unscrupulous and piratical publisher, Pope's constant butt. See *Dunciad*, bk. ii. v. 57, *seq.* Osborne was the bookseller whom Johnson was reported to have knocked down one

Johnson came among them the solitary specimen of a past age, the last survivor of the genuine race of Grub Street hacks; the last of that generation of authors whose abject misery and whose dissolute manners had furnished inexhaustible matter to the satirical genius of Pope. From nature he had received an uncouth figure, a diseased constitution, and an irritable temper. The manner in which the earlier years of his manhood had been passed had given to his demeanor, and even to his moral character, some peculiarities appalling to the civilized beings who were the companions of his old age. The perverse irregularity of his hours, the slovenliness of his person, his fits of strenuous exertion, interrupted by long intervals of sluggishness, his strange abstinence, and his equally strange voracity, his active benevolence, contrasted with the constant rudeness and the occasional ferocity of his manners in society, made him, in the opinion of those with whom he lived during the last twenty years of his life, a complete original. An original he was, undoubtedly, in some respects. But if we possessed full information concerning those who shared his early hardships, we should probably find that what we call his singularities of manner were for the most part failings, which he had in common with the class to which he belonged. He ate at Streatham Park as he had been used to eat behind the screen at St. John's Gate, when he was ashamed to show his ragged clothes. He ate as it was natural that a man should eat, who, during a great part of his life, had passed the morning in doubt whether he should have food for the afternoon. The habits of his early life had accustomed him to bear privation with fortitude, but not to taste pleasure with moderation. He could fast; but when he did not fast, he tore his dinner like a famished wolf, with the veins

day in his shop with one of his own folios. See Johnson's emended version of the story, in BOSWELL. (1742.)

5. **The satirical genius of Pope.** Poverty, in Pope's eyes, is the most unpardonable of sins, and in the *Dunciad* no charge is so frequently brought against authors as poverty.

23. **Streatham Park.** The country residence of the Thrales.

24. **St. John's Gate.** The office of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. During the first years of his life in London Johnson was a regular contributor, and in its pages appeared his reports of speeches in Parliament,

swelling on his forehead, and the perspiration running down his cheeks. He scarcely ever took wine. But when he drank it, he drank it greedily and in large tumblers. There were, in fact, mitigated symptoms of that same moral disease which
 5 raged with such deadly malignity in his friends Savage and Boyse. The roughness and violence which he showed in society were to be expected from a man whose temper, not naturally gentle, had been long tried by the bitterest calamities, by the want of meat, of fire, and of clothes, by the importu-
 10 nity of creditors, by the insolence of booksellers, by the derision of fools, by the insincerity of patrons, by that bread which is the bitterest of all food, by those stairs which are the most toilsome of all paths, by that deferred hope which makes the heart sick. Through all these things the ill-dressed,
 15 coarse, ungainly pedant had struggled manfully up to eminence and command. It was natural that, in the exercise of his power, he should be "*eo immitior, quia toleraverat*," that, though his heart was undoubtedly generous and humane, his demeanor in society should be harsh and des-
 20 potic. For severe distress he had sympathy, and not only sympathy, but munificent relief. But for the suffering which a harsh word inflicts upon a delicate mind he had no pity; for it was a kind of suffering which he could scarcely conceive. He would carry home on his shoulders a sick and starving
 25 girl from the streets. He turned his house into a place of refuge for a crowd of wretched old creatures who could find no other asylum; nor could all their peevishness and ingratitude weary out his benevolence. But the pangs of wounded vanity seemed to him ridiculous; and he scarcely felt suffi-

12. By that bread which is the bitterest of all food, by those stairs, etc. From Dante's *Paradiso*, canto xvii 56:

"Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares

Upon another's bread,—how steep his path

Who treadeth up and down another's stairs."—ROSSETTI.

Cacciaguida is foretelling to Dante his future fortunes, his exile, his persecution and his life of dependence at the court of the Scaligeri.

13. That deferred hope.—*Proverbs* xiii. 12.

17. *Eo immitior*. From Tacitus's *Annals*, i. 20. Said of Rufus, who had risen from the ranks to be first a centurion, then præfect of the camp. On the same principle it is often said that the greatest bully is the boy who has been bullied himself.

cient compassion even for the pangs of wounded affection. He had seen and felt so much of sharp misery that he was not affected by paltry vexations; and he seemed to think that everybody ought to be as much hardened to those vexations as himself. He was angry with Boswell for complaining of 5 a headache, with Mrs. Thrale for grumbling about the dust on the road, or the smell of the kitchen. These were, in his phrase, "foppish lamentations," which people ought to be ashamed to utter in a world so full of misery. Goldsmith crying because the *Good-natured Man* had failed, inspired 10 him with no pity. Though his own health was not good, he detested and despised valetudinarians. Even great pecuniary losses, unless they reduced the loser absolutely to beggary, moved him very little. People whose hearts had been softened by prosperity might cry, he said, for such events; but 15 all that could be expected of a plain man was not to laugh.

A person who troubled himself so little about small or sentimental grievances of human life was not likely to be very attentive to the feelings of others in the ordinary intercourse of society. He could not understand how a sarcasm or a rep- 20 rimand could make any man really unhappy. "My dear doctor," said he to Goldsmith, "what harm does it do a man to call him Holofernes?" "Pooh, ma'am," he exclaimed

5. He was angry with Boswell. See BOSWELL, i 394. (1763.)

10. Goldsmith crying, etc. The *Good-natured Man* was first performed at Covent Garden Theater on the 29th of January, 1768. "It failed upon the stage in some measure from its very merits, some of its comic scenes shocking the perverted taste of an audience which admired the whining, preaching, sentimental pieces which were then in fashion."—SHAW. "Returning home one day from dining at the chaplain's table, Mr. Johnson told me that Dr. Goldsmith had given a very comical and unnecessarily exact recital there of his own feelings when his play was hissed; telling the company how he went to the Literary Club at night and chatted gayly among his friends as if nothing had happened a-miss; that to impress them still more forcibly with an idea of his magnanimity, he even sung his favorite song about 'an old woman tossed in a blanket seventeen times as high as the moon.' 'But all this while I was suffering horrible tortures,' said he, 'and verily believe that if I had put a bit in my mouth it would have strangled me on the spot, I was so excessively ill. But I made more noise than usual to cover all that, and so they never perceived my not eating, nor I believe at all imagined to themselves the anguish of my heart; but when all were gone except Johnson here, I burst out a-crying, and even swore that I would never write again.' 'All which, doctor,' said Johnson, amazed at his odd frankness, 'I thought had been a secret between you and me; and I am sure I would not have said anything about it for the world.'"—Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, p. 245.

21. "My dear doctor," said he to Goldsmith, etc. Many such mor-

to Mrs. Carter, "who is the worse for being talked of uncharitably?" Politeness has been well defined as benevolence in small things. Johnson was impolite, not because he wanted benevolence, but because small things appeared smaller to him than to people who had never known what it was to live for fourpence-halfpenny a day.

The characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices. If we judged of him by the best parts of his mind, we should place him almost as high as he was placed by the idolatry of Boswell; if by the worst parts of his mind, we should place him even below Boswell himself. Where he was not under the influence of some strange scruple, or some domineering passion, which prevented him from boldly and fairly investigating a subject, he was a wary and acute reasoner, a little too much inclined to scepticism, and a little too fond of paradox. No man was less likely to be imposed upon by fallacies in argument or by exaggerated statements of fact. But if, while he was beating down sophisms and exposing false testimony, some childish prejudices, such as would excite laughter in a well-managed nursery, came across him, he was smitten as if by enchantment. His mind dwindled away under the spell from gigantic elevation to dwarfish littleness. Those who had lately been admiring its amplitude and its force were now as much astonished at its strange narrowness and feebleness as the fisherman in the Arabian tale, when he saw the Genie, whose stature had overshadowed the whole sea-coast, and whose might seemed equal to a contest with armies, contract

tifications arose in the course of their intimacy, to be sure, but few more laughable than when the newspapers had tacked them [Goldsmith and Johnson] together as the pedant and his flatterer in *Love's Labor Lost*. Dr. Goldsmith came to his friend, fretting and foaming, and vowing vengeance against the printer, etc., till Mr. Johnson, tired of the bustle, and desirous to think of something else cried out at last, "Why, what wouldst thou have, dear doctor? Who the plague is hurt with all this nonsense? and how is a man the worse, I wonder, in his health, purse, or character, for being called *Holofernes*?" "I do not know," replies the other, "how you may relish being called *Holofernes*, but I do not like at least to play *Goodman Dull*."—Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, p. 180.

26. The fisherman. See *The Arabian Nights*, "The History of the Fisherman."

himself to the dimensions of his small prison, and lie there the helpless slave of the charm of Solomon.

Johnson was in the habit of sifting with extreme severity the evidence for all stories which were merely odd. But when they were not only odd but miraculous, his severity relaxed. 5 He began to be credulous precisely at the point where the most credulous people begin to be sceptical. It is curious to observe, both in his writings and in his conversation, the contrast between the disdainful manner in which he rejects unauthenticated anecdotes, even when they are consistent 10 with the general laws of nature, and the respectful manner in which he mentions the wildest stories relating to the invisible world. A man who told him of a water-spout or a meteoric stone generally had the lie direct given him for his pains. A man who told him of a prediction or a dream wonderfully 15 accomplished was sure of a courteous hearing. "Johnson," observed Hogarth, "like king David, says in his haste that all men are liars." "His incredulity," says Mrs. Thrale, "amounted almost to disease." She tells us how he browbeat a gentleman who gave him an account of a hurricane in the 20 West Indies, and a poor Quaker who related some strange circumstance about the red-hot balls fired at the siege of Gibraltar. "It is not so. It cannot be true. Don't tell that story again. You cannot think how poor a figure you make in telling it." He once said, half-jestingly, we suppose, that 25 for six months he refused to credit the fact of the earthquake at Lisbon, and that he still believed the extent of the calamity to be greatly exaggerated. Yet he related with a

17. **Hogarth.** A celebrated painter (1697-1764).

20 **An account of a hurricane, etc.** The reason he gave Mrs. Thrale for his incredulity about the hurricane is characteristic: "'Tis so easy for a man to fill his mouth with a wonder, and run about telling the lie before it can be detected, that I have no heart to believe hurricanes easily raised by the first inventor, and blown afterwards by thousands more."—Prozzi's *Anecdotes*, p. 140.

22. **The siege of Gibraltar.** The story is thus introduced by Madame Piozzi: "Two gentlemen I perfectly well remember dining with us at Streatham in the summer of 1782, when Elliott's brave defense of Gibraltar was a subject of common discourse."—Page 138.

27. **The earthquake at Lisbon.** Occurred in 1755. See Prozzi, p. 141.

grave face how old Mr. Cave of St. John's Gate saw a ghost, and how this ghost was something of a shadowy being. He went himself on a ghost-hunt to Cock Lane, and was angry with John Wesley for not following up another scent of the same kind with proper spirit and perseverance. He rejects the Celtic genealogies and poems without the least hesitation; yet he declares himself willing to believe the stories of the second-sight. If he had examined the claims of the Highland seers with half the severity with which he sifted the evidence for the genuineness of *Fingal*, he would, we suspect, have come away from Scotland with a mind fully made up. In his *Lives of the Poets* we find that he is unwilling to give credit to the accounts of Lord Roscommon's early proficiency in his studies; but he tells with great solemnity an absurd romance

1. **Mr. Cave . . . saw a ghost.** "Talking of ghosts, he said he knew one friend who was an honest man and a sensible man, who told him he had seen a ghost—old Mr. Edward Cave, the printer at St. John's Gate. He said Mr. Cave did not like to talk of it, and seemed to be in great horror whenever it was mentioned. BOSWELL: 'Pray, sir, what did he say was the appearance?' JOHNSON: 'Why, sir, something of a shadowy being.'—BOSWELL, ii. 180. (1772)

3. **A ghost-hunt to Cock Lane.** "Churchill, in his poem entitled *The Ghost*, availed himself of the absurd credulity imputed to Johnson, and drew a caricature of him under the name of 'Pomposo,' representing him as one of the believers of the story of a ghost in Cock Lane, which in the year 1762 had gained very general credit in London."—BOSWELL, i. 345. (1763.)

4. **John Wesley.** "Of John Wesley he said, 'He can talk well on any subject.' BOSWELL: 'Pray, sir, what has he made of his story of a ghost?' JOHNSON: 'Why, sir, he believes it, but not on sufficient authority. He did not take time enough to examine the girl. It was at Newcastle, where the ghost was said to have appeared to a young woman several times, mentioning something about the right to an old house, advising application to be made to an attorney, which was done; and at the same time saying the attorney would do nothing, which proved to be the fact. "This (says John) is a proof that a ghost knows our thoughts." Now (laughing) it is not necessary to know our thoughts to tell that an attorney will sometimes do nothing. Charles Wesley, who is a more stationary man, does not believe the story. I am sorry that John did not take more pains to inquire into the evidence for it.' MISS SEWARD (with an incredulous smile): 'What, sir! about a ghost?' JOHNSON (with solemn vehemence): 'Yes, madam. This is a question which, after five thousand years, is yet undecided; a question, whether in theology or philosophy, one of the most important that can come before the human understanding.'"—BOSWELL, iii. 299.

10. **Fingal.** An epic poem in six books, by Macpherson, professing to be a translation from the Gaelic.

13. **Dillon, afterward Earl of Roscommon,** was born during the lieutenancy of his uncle, Lord Strafford, by whom he was sent to Caen when Strafford was threatened with impeachment. "That he was sent to Caen is certain; that he was a great scholar may be doubted."—JOHNSON, *Lives*, Earl of Roscommon.

14. **An absurd romance, etc.** At Caen he [Lord] Roscommon is said to have had some preternatural intelligence of his father's death.

about some intelligence preternaturally impressed on the mind of that nobleman. He avows himself to be in great doubt about the truth of the story, and ends by warning his readers not wholly to slight such impressions.

Many of his sentiments on religious subjects are worthy of a liberal and enlarged mind. He could discern clearly enough the folly and meanness of all bigotry except his own. When he spoke of the scruples of the Puritans, he spoke like a person who had really obtained an insight into the divine philosophy of the New Testament, and who considered Christianity as a noble scheme of government, tending to promote the happiness and to elevate the moral nature of man. The horror which the sectaries felt for cards, Christmas ale, plum-porridge, mince-pies, and dancing bears, excited his contempt. To the arguments urged by some very worthy people against showy dress he replied with admirable sense and spirit, "Let us not be found, when our Master calls us, stripping the lace off our waistcoats, but the spirit of contention from our souls and tongues. Alas! sir, a man who cannot get to heaven in a green coat will not find his way thither the sooner in a gray one." Yet he was himself under the tyranny of scruples as unreasonable as those of Hudibras or Ralpho, and carried his zeal for ceremonies and for ecclesiastical dignities to lengths altogether inconsistent with reason or with Christian charity. He has gravely noted down in his diary that he once committed the sin of drinking coffee on Good Friday. In Scotland he thought it his duty to pass several months without joining in public worship, solely because the ministers of the kirk had not been ordained by bishops. His mode of estimating the piety of his neighbors was somewhat singular. "Campbell," said he, "is a good man, a pious man. I am

22. **Hudibras or Ralpho.** The principal characters in Samuel Butler's famous burlesque. Sir Hudibras, a caricature of the Presbyterian, is a justice of the peace, who sallies forth on a crusade against the amusements of the people. Ralph, his clerk, represents the Independent.

31. **Campbell is a good man, etc.** BOSWELL, i. 355. (1763). Dr. John Campbell, a political and biographical writer. He says of him: "He is a very inquisitive and a very able man, and a man of good religious principles,

afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows he has good principles." Spain and Sicily must surely contain many pious robbers and well-principled
 5 assassins. Johnson could easily see that a Roundhead who named all his children after Solomon's singers, and talked in the House of Commons about seeking the Lord, might be an unprincipled villain, whose religious mummeries only aggravated his guilt. But a man who took off his hat when he
 10 passed a church episcopally consecrated must be a good man, a pious man, a man of good principles. Johnson could easily see that those persons who looked on a dance or a laced waistcoat as sinful deemed most ignobly of the attributes of God and of the ends of revelation. But with what a storm of in-
 15 vective he would have overwhelmed any man who had blamed him for celebrating the close of Lent with sugarless tea and butterless buns!

Nobody spoke more contemptuously of the cant of patriotism. Nobody saw more clearly the error of those who represented liberty not as a means, but as an end, and who
 20 proposed to themselves, as the object of their pursuit, the prosperity of the state as distinct from the prosperity of the individuals who compose the state. His calm and settled opinion seems to have been that forms of government have
 25 little or no influence on the happiness of society. This opinion, erroneous as it is, ought at least to have preserved him from all intemperance on political questions. It did not, however, preserve him from the lowest, fiercest, and most absurd extravagances of party spirit, from rants which, in
 30 everything but the diction, resembled those of Squire Western. He was, as a politician, half ice and half fire. On the side of his intellect he was a mere pocourante, far too apathetic about public affairs, far too skeptical as to the good or evil

though I am afraid he has been deficient in practice. Campbell is radically right, and we may hope that in time there will be good practice."

5. **Roundhead.** Another name for the Puritans. Cromwell's party in the Revolution against King Charles I.

30. **Squire Western.** The foul-mouthed, boorish country squire in *Tom Jones*.

tendency of any form of polity. His passions, on the contrary, were violent even to slaying against all who leaned to Whiggish principles. The well-known lines which he inserted in Goldsmith's *Traveller* express what seems to have been his deliberate judgment:

“How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which kings or laws can cause or cure!”

5

He had previously put expressions very similar into the mouth of Rasselas. It is amusing to contrast these passages with the torrents of raving abuse which he poured forth against the Long Parliament and the American Congress. In one of the conversations reported by Boswell this inconsistency displays itself in the most ludicrous manner.

“Sir Adam Ferguson,” says Boswell, “suggested that luxury corrupts a people, and destroys the spirit of liberty. JOHNSON: ‘Sir, that is all visionary. I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual. Sir, the danger of the abuse of power is nothing to a private man. What Frenchman is prevented passing his life as he pleases?’ SIR ADAM: ‘But, sir, in the British Constitution it is surely of importance to keep up a spirit in the people, so as to preserve a balance against the crown.’ JOHNSON: ‘Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig. Why all this childish jealousy of the power of the crown? The crown has not power enough.’”

One of the old philosophers, Lord Bacon tells us, used to say that life and death were just the same to him. “Why then,” said an objector, “do you not kill yourself?” The philosopher answered, “Because it is just the same.” If the difference between two forms of government be not worth half a guinea, it is not easy to see how Whiggism can be viler

4. Goldsmith's *Traveller*. *The Traveller; or, A Prospect of Society*, was published in 1764. The concluding ten lines of the poem, except the last couplet but one, were written by Johnson.

9. *Rasselas*. A novel of Johnson's, published 1759, which he wrote in the nights of one week, to defray the expenses of his mother's funeral.

14. Sir Adam Ferguson, etc. See BOSWELL, ii. 172. (1772.)

than Toryism, or how the crown can have too little power. If private men suffer nothing from political abuses, zeal for liberty is doubtless ridiculous. But zeal for monarchy must be equally so. No person could have been more quick-sighted than Johnson to such a contradiction as this in the logic of an antagonist.

The judgments which Johnson passed on books were, in his own time, regarded with superstitious veneration, and, in our time, are generally treated with indiscriminate contempt. 10 They are the judgments of a strong but enslaved understanding. The mind of the critic was hedged round by an uninterrupted fence of prejudices and superstitions. Within his narrow limits he displayed a vigor and an activity which ought to have enabled him to clear the barrier that confined 15 him.

How it chanced that a man who reasoned on his premises so ably should assume his premises so foolishly is one of the great mysteries of human nature. The same inconsistency may be observed in the schoolmen of the middle ages. Those 20 writers show so much acuteness and force of mind in arguing on their wretched *data*, that a modern reader is perpetually at a loss to comprehend how such minds came by such data. Not a flaw in the superstructure of the theory which they are rearing escapes their vigilance. Yet they are blind to the 25 obvious unsoundness of the foundation. It is the same with some eminent lawyers. Their legal arguments are intellectual prodigies, abounding with the happiest analogies and the most refined distinctions. The principles of their arbitrary science being once admitted, the statute-book and the reports 30 being once assumed as the foundations of jurisprudence, these men must be allowed to be perfect masters of logic. But if a question arises as to the postulates on which their whole

19. **Schoolmen.** Philosophical divines of the middle ages especially from, the 11th century to the Reformation, who spent much time on points of nice and abstract speculation. They acknowledged Aristotle as their master. They were so called because they taught in the mediæval universities and schools of divinity. Against Macaulay's sweeping condemnation of them we may at least quote Liebnitz's apology:

"Il y a encore de l'or dans ces scories."

system rests, if they are called upon to vindicate the fundamental maxims of that system which they have passed their lives in studying, these very men often talk the language of savages or of children. Those who have listened to a man of this class in his own court, and who have witnessed the skill with which he analyzes and digests a vast mass of evidence, or reconciles a crowd of precedents which at first sight seem contradictory, scarcely know him again when, a few hours later, they hear him speaking on the other side of Westminster Hall in his capacity of legislator. They can scarcely believe that the paltry quirks which are faintly heard through a storm of coughing, and which cannot impose on the plainest country gentleman, can proceed from the same sharp and vigorous intellect which had excited their admiration under the same roof, and on the same day.

Johnson decided literary questions like a lawyer, not like a legislator. He never examined foundations where a point was already ruled. His whole code of criticism rested on pure assumption, for which he sometimes quoted a precedent or an authority, but rarely troubled himself to give a reason drawn from the nature of things. He took it for granted that the kind of poetry which flourished in his own time, which he had been accustomed to hear praised from his childhood, and which he had himself written with success, was the best kind of poetry. In his biographical work he has repeatedly laid it down as an undeniable proposition that during the latter part of the seventeenth century, and the earlier part of the eighteenth, English poetry had been in a constant progress of improvement. Waller, Denham, Dryden, and Pope had been, according to him, the great reformers. He judged of all works of the imagination by the standard established among his own contemporaries. Though he allowed

9. **Westminster Hall.** The law courts were established here in 1224.

29. **Waller, Denham, Dryden, Pope.** "Waller certainly very much excelled in smoothness most of the writers who were living when his poetry commenced. . . . The critical decision has given the praise of strength to Denham, and of sweetness to Waller."

Homer to have been a greater man than Virgil, he seems to have thought the *Aeneid* a greater poem than the *Iliad*. Indeed, he well might have thought so; for he preferred Pope's *Iliad* to Homer's. He pronounced that, after Hoole's translation of *Tasso*, Fairfax's would hardly be reprinted. He could see no merit in our fine old English ballads, and always spoke with the most provoking contempt of Percy's fondness for them. Of all the great original works which appeared during his time, Richardson's novels alone excited his admiration. (He could see little or no merit in *Tom Jones*, in *Gulliver's Travels*, or in *Tristram Shandy*.) To Thomson's

1. **Though he allowed Homer, etc.** "He said the dispute as to the comparative excellence of Homer or Virgil was inaccurate. 'We must consider (said he) whether Homer was not the greatest poet, though Virgil may have produced the finest poem.'"—BOSWELL, iii. 197. (1777.)

4. **He preferred Pope's *Iliad* to Homer's.** I know of no authority for this statement. In his *Life of Pope* Johnson says: "Had he given the world only his version, the name of poet must have been allowed him. If the writer of the *Iliad* were to class his successors, he would assign a very high place to his translator, without requiring any other evidence of genius."

5. **After Hoole's translation etc.** Edward Fairfax published in 1600 a translation of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, under the title of *Godfrey of Bouillon*, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth. Hoole published his *Tasso* in 1763, and Johnson wrote the dedication to the Queen.

7. **Percy's fondness for them.** Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore, published in 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, to which was prefixed an *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*. Johnson's parody of the *Babes in the Wood* is familiar to most readers:

"I put my hat upon my head,
And walked into the Strand;
And there I met another man,
Whose hat was in his hand."

But it is only fair to quote at the same time the letter to Boswell in which he says: "Percy's attention to poetry has given grace and splendor to his studies of antiquity."

10. **He could see little or no merit in *Tom Jones*, by Fielding.** "Fielding being mentioned, Johnson exclaimed, 'He was a blockhead;' and upon my expressing my astonishment at so strange an assertion, he said, 'What I mean by his being a blockhead is that he was a barren rascal.' BOSWELL: 'Will you not allow, sir, that he draws very natural pictures of human life?' JOHNSON: 'Why, sir, it is of very low life. Richardson used to say that had he not known who Fielding was, he should have believed he was an ostler. Sir, there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*.'"—BOSWELL. On another occasion he remarked that Richardson had picked the kernel of life, while Fielding was contented with the husk.

11. ***Gulliver's Travels*.** In his *Life of Swift* he says: "This important year [1727] sent likewise into the world *Gulliver's Travels*, a production so new and strange that it filled the reader with a mingled emotion of merriment and amazement. It was received with such avidity that the price of the first edition was raised before the second could be made; it was read by the high and the low, the learned and the illiterate. Criticism was for a while lost in wonder; no rules of judgment were applied to a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity.

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* "JOHNSON: 'Nothing odd will do long.

Castle of Indolence he vouchsafed only a line of cold commendation, of commendation much colder than what he has bestowed on the creation of that portentous bore, Sir Richard Blackmore. Gray was, in his dialect, a barren rascal. Churchill was a blockhead. The contempt which he felt for the trash of Macpherson was, indeed, just; but it was, we suspect, just by chance. He despised the *Fingal* for the very reason which led many men of genius to admire it. He despised it, not because it was essentially commonplace, but because it had a superficial air of originality. 10

He was undoubtedly an excellent judge of compositions fashioned on his own principles. But when a deeper philosophy was required, when he undertook to pronounce judgment on the works of those great minds which "yield homage only to eternal laws," his failure was ignominious. He criticised Pope's epitaphs excellently. But his observations on Shakespeare's plays and Milton's poems seem to us for the most part as wretched as if they had been written by Rymer

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* did not last.'"—BOSWELL, ii. 448. (1776.) Elsewhere he talks of the author as "the man Sterne."

1. **Thomson's Castle of Indolence.** All Johnson says of it in his *Life of Thomson* is as follows: "The last piece that he lived to publish was the *Castle of Indolence*, which was many years under his hand, but was at last finished with great accuracy. The first canto opens a scene of lazy luxury that fills the imagination."

4. **Sir Richard Blackmore.** Born 1658, died 1729. He received the honor of knighthood from King William, not for his verses, but his physic. Johnson says of his poem, *The Creation*: "This poem, if he had written nothing else, would have transmitted him to posterity among the first favorites of the English muse."

Gray. "He attacked Gray, calling him 'a dull fellow.' BOSWELL: 'I understand he was reserved, and might appear dull in company; but surely he was not dull in poetry.' JOHNSON: 'Sir, he was dull in company, dull in his closet, dull everywhere. He was dull in a new way, and that made many people think him GREAT. He was a mechanical poet. No, sir, there are but two good stanzas in Gray's poetry, which are in his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*.' He then repeated the stanza—

'For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,' " etc.

—BOSWELL, ii. 329. (1775.)

So too in his *Life of Gray*, the *Elegy* is the only one of Gray's poems which he commends.

5. **Churchill.** See above, p. 28.

16. **Pope's Epitaphs.** In an appendix to his *Life of Pope*.

17. **Shakespeare's plays.** In his introduction to *Shakespeare*.

Milton's poems. Johnson's judgment on *Lycidas*—"The diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing"—has passed into a proverb as an example of mistaken criticism. De Quincey, in his *Miscellanies*, has an eloquent vindication of Milton against Johnson's strictures.

18. **Thomas Rymer** (1640-1714). Historiographer-royal in 1692. He

himself, whom we take to have been the worst critic that ever lived.

Some of Johnson's whims on literary subjects can be compared only to that strange nervous feeling which made him uneasy if he had not touched every post between the Mitre tavern and his own lodgings. His preference of Latin epitaphs to English epitaphs is an instance. An English epitaph, he said, would disgrace Smollett. He declared that he would not pollute the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English epitaph on Goldsmith. What reason there can be for celebrating a British writer in Latin, which there was not for covering the Roman arches of triumph with Greek inscriptions, or for commemorating the deeds of the heroes of Thermopylæ in Egyptian hieroglyphics, we are utterly unable to imagine.

On men and manners, at least on the men and manners of a particular place and a particular age, Johnson had certainly looked with a most observant and discriminating eye. His remarks on the education of children, on marriage, on the economy of families, on the rules of society, are always striking, and generally sound. In his writings, indeed, the knowledge of life which he possessed in an eminent degree is very imperfectly exhibited. Like those unfortunate chiefs of the middle ages who were suffocated by their own chain-mail and cloth of gold, his maxims perish under that load of words which was designed for their ornament and their defense. But it is clear from the remains of his conversations, that he

was a poor critic, but an industrious compiler. Pope, unlike Macaulay, regarded him as "on the whole one of the best critics we have ever had."

8. **Smollett.** Born 1721, died 1771. The great naval novelist, the author of *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphrey Clinker*. Like Fielding, he died and was buried in a foreign land.

10. **An English epitaph on Goldsmith.** See the story of the round-robin asking Johnson to re-write the epitaph in English, of which Sir Joshua Reynolds was the bearer. "He desired Sir Joshua to tell the gentlemen that he would alter the epitaph in any manner they pleased as to the sense of it; but he would never consent to disgrace the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English inscription."—BOSWELL. *Non obstante* Lord Macaulay, something may be said in favor of Latin epitaphs. For instance, is it possible in English to reproduce the brevity and pointedness of this sentence from Goldsmith's epitaph: "Nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit"?

had more of that homely wisdom which nothing but experience and observation can give than any writer since the time of Swift. If he had been content to write as he talked, he might have left books on the practical art of living superior to the *Directions to Servants*. 5

Yet even his remarks on society, like his remarks on literature, indicate a mind at least as remarkable for narrowness as for strength. He was no master of the great science of human nature. He had studied, not the *genus* man, but the *species* Londoner. Nobody was ever so thoroughly conversant 10 with all the forms of life and all the shades of moral and intellectual character which were to be seen from Islington to the Thames, and from Hyde Park corner to Mile-end green. But his philosophy stopped at the first turnpike-gate. Of the rural life of England he knew nothing; and he took it for granted 15 that everybody who lived in the country was either stupid or miserable. "Country gentlemen," said he, "must be unhappy; for they have not enough to keep their lives in motion;" as if all those peculiar habits and associations which made Fleet Street and Charing Cross the finest views 20 in the world to himself had been essential parts of human nature. Of remote countries and past times he talked with wild and ignorant presumption. "The Athenians of the age of Demosthenes," he said to Mrs. Thrale, "were a people of brutes, a barbarous people." In conversation with Sir Adam 25 Ferguson he used similar language. "The boasted Athenians," he said, "were barbarians. The mass of every people must be barbarous where there is no printing." The fact was this: he saw that a Londoner who could not read, was a very stupid and brutal fellow: he saw that great refinement of taste and 30 activity of intellect were rarely found in a Londoner who had not read much; and, because it was by means of books that people acquired almost all their knowledge in the society with which he was acquainted, he concluded, in defiance of

5. **Directions to servants.** A set of ironical rules by which the faults, tricks, blunders, and various knaveries of domestic servants are pointed out. *E.g.*, "Wear your lady's smock when she has thrown it off. It will do you credit, save your own linen, and be not a pin the worse."

the strongest and clearest evidence, that the human mind can be cultivated by means of books alone. An Athenian citizen might possess very few volumes; and the largest library to which he had access might be much less valuable than Johnson's book-case in Bolt Court. But the Athenian might pass every morning in conversation with Socrates, and might hear Pericles speak four or five times every month. He saw the plays of Sophocles and Aristophanes: he walked amidst the friezes of Phidias and the paintings of Zeuxis: he knew by heart the choruses of Æschylus: he heard the rhapsodist at the corner of the street reciting the Shield of Achilles or the Death of Argus: he was a legislator conversant with high questions of alliance, revenue, and war: he was a soldier trained under a liberal and generous discipline: he was a judge, compelled every day to weigh the effect of opposite arguments. These things were in themselves an education, an education eminently fitted, not, indeed, to form exact or profound thinkers, but to give quickness to the perceptions, delicacy to the taste, fluency to the expression, and politeness to the manners. All this was overlooked. An Athenian who did not improve his mind by reading was, in Johnson's opinion, much such a person as a Cockney who made his mark, much such a person as black Frank before he went to school, and far inferior to a parish clerk or a printer's devil.

5. **Bolt Court.** Between Fleet Street and Holborn.

7. **Pericles.** The greatest of Athenian statesmen; d. 429.

8. **Sophocles.** A Greek tragic poet; b. 495 B.C.; d. 405 B.C.

Aristophanes. The most celebrated comic poet of Greece. Born 441 B.C.; died about 380 B.C.

9. **The friezes of Phidias** (one of the greatest sculptors of the world. Born about 485 B.C., died about 432 B.C.). In particular those of the Parthenon, which may be still seen in the British Museum.

The paintings of Zeuxis (a celebrated Greek painter. Born 450 B.C.). Every one knows the story of the grapes. Besides this picture, his most famous were the "Infant Hercules Strangling the Serpent" and the "Female Hippocentaur."

10. **Æschylus.** The first of the tragic poets of Greece; b. 525 B.C., d. 456 B.C.

The rhapsodist. From *ῥάπτω* and *ὥδή*, properly one who stitched songs together, especially of those who sang the lays of Homer. In the later times of Greek history they were a low and ignorant class of ballad-mongers, only acceptable to the common people. Hence the English use of the word.

11. **The shield of Achilles.** From Homer's *Iliad*.

12. **The death of Argus.** From Homer's *Odyssey*.

22. **Cockney.** A term of contempt among Londoners.

23. **Black Frank, before he went to school.** See above, p. 17. John-

our readers, and have been so often burlesqued, that it is almost superfluous to point them out. It is well known that he made less use than any other eminent writer of those strong, plain words, Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French, of which the roots lie in the inmost depths of our language : and that he ⁵ felt a vicious partiality for terms which, long after our own speech had been fixed, were borrowed from the Greek and Latin, and which, therefore, even when lawfully naturalized, must be considered as born aliens, not entitled to rank with the king's English. (His constant practice of padding out a ¹⁰ sentence with useless epithets, till it became as stiff as the bust of an exquisite, his antithetical forms of expression, constantly employed even where there is no opposition in the ideas expressed, his big words wasted on little things, his harsh inversions, so widely different from those graceful and easy ¹⁵ inversions which give variety, spirit, and sweetness to the expression of our great old writers, all these peculiarities have been imitated by his admirers, and parodied by his assailants, till the public has become sick of the subject.)

(Goldsmith said to him, very wittily and very justly, "If ²⁰ you were to write a fable about little fishes, doctor, you would make the little fishes talk like whales.") No man surely ever

tains have ere now produced muscicular abortions, and he who compares incipient grandeur with final decay is reminded of the hawker who perambulates the streets of Constantinople, exclaiming, 'In the name of the Prophet Figs.''' On the other hand, we may remark that many of Johnson's words which were ridiculed as new fangled and "long-tailed" have since passed into every-day language. For instance, Dr. Barrowes, in his *Essay on the Style of Johnson* (1787), abuses him for using "resuscitation," "fatuity," "asinine," "narcotic," "sensory," "panoply," "cremation," "horticulture."

4. **Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French.** Anglo-Saxon, or, as it ought perhaps more correctly to be called, Early English, forms the whole scaffolding of the language. From it we derive our grammar, inflections, and terminations, the pronouns and prepositions, and most of the names for common objects. By Norman-French words are meant the words adopted into English from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. The Normans, by origin a Scandinavian race, adopted the French language after their settlement in Neustria.

If we count the words in Dr. Johnson's *Preface to Dictionary*, we shall find that 72 per cent are Anglo-Saxon, and 28 Latin or Greek; from which fact we may infer that, "even in those authors whose total vocabulary embraces the greatest number of Latin and other foreign vocables, the Anglo-Saxon still largely predominates."—MARSH, *Lectures on the English Language*.

20. Goldsmith said to him. See BOSWELL, ii. p. 233. (1773.)

had so little talent for personation as Johnson. Whether he wrote in the character of a disappointed legacy-hunter or an empty town fop, of a crazy virtuoso or a flippant coquette, he wrote in the same pompous and unbending style. His
 5 speech, like Sir Piercy Shafton's euphuistic eloquence, betrayed him under every disguise. Euphelia and Rhodoclea talk as finely as Imlac the poet, or Seged, Emperor of Ethiopia. The gay Cornelia describes her reception at the country-house of her relations in such terms as these: "I was surprised,
 10 after the civilities of my first reception, to find, instead of the leisure and tranquillity which a rural life always promises, and, if well-conducted, might always afford, a confused wildness of care, and a tumultuous hurry of diligence, by which every face was clouded, and every motion agitated." The
 15 gentle Tranquilla informs us that she "had not passed the earlier part of life without the flattery of courtship, and the joys of triumph; but had danced the round of gayety amidst the murmurs of envy and the gratulations of applause, had been attended from pleasure to pleasure by the great, the
 20 sprightly, and the vain, and had seen her regard solicited by the obsequiousness of gallantry, the gayety of wit, and the timidity of love." Surely Sir John Falstaff himself did not

5. Sir Piercy Shafton. From Sir W. Scott's *Monastery*.

Euphuistic eloquence. Euphuism took its name from the *Euphues* of John Leyly, which appeared in 1578. It is an affected jargon, like that of the Hôtel Rambouillet, which Molière derided in his *Précieuses Ridicules*. The schoolmaster Holofernes in *Love's Labor's Lost* is a Euphuist.

Euphelia writes to the *Rambler* on the mischief of faction (No. 46), and on the misery of a modish lady in solitude. (No. 42.)

6. **Rhodocleia** describes a young lady's impatience to see London. (*Rambler*, 62.)

7. **Imlac, the poet.** From *Rasselas*.

Seged, Emperor of Ethiopia. From *Rambler*, No. 204, 205.

The history of ten days of Seged, etc. A *Rasselas* in miniature, the moral of the story being the vanity of the pursuit of pleasure.

8. **Cornelia.** From *Rambler*, 51.

15. **Tranquilla.** From *Rambler*, 119.

22. **Surely, Sir John Falstaff, etc.** In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Lord Macaulay himself in a note calls attention to the resemblance between this sentence and one in the *Rambler* (No. 20), which we may here quote: "It is almost a general ambition of those who favor me with their advice for the regulation of my conduct, or their contribution for the assistance of my understanding, to affect the style and names of ladies. And I cannot always

wear his petticoats with a worse grace. The reader may well cry out, with honest Sir Hugh Evans, "I like not when a woman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler."

We had something more to say. But our article is already 5 too long; and we must close it. We would fain part in good humor from the hero, from the biographer, and even from the editor, who, ill as he has performed his task, has at least this claim to our gratitude, that he has induced us to read Boswell's book again. As we close it, the club-room is before us, 10 and the table on which stand the omelet for Nugent, and the lemons for Johnson. There are assembled those heads which live forever on the canvas of Reynolds. There are the spectacles of Burke and the tall, thin form of Langton, the courtly sneer of Beauclerk and the beaming smile of Garrick, Gibbon 15 tapping his snuff-box, and Sir Joshua with his trumpet in his ear. In the foreground is that strange figure which is as familiar to us as the figures of those among whom we have been brought up, the gigantic body, the huge, massy face, seamed with the scars of disease, the brown coat, the black 20 worsted stockings, the gray wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing; and then comes the "Why sir!" and the "What then, sir?" and the "No, 25 sir!" and the "You don't see your way through the question, sir!"

What a singular destiny has been that of this remarkable man! To be regarded in his own age as a classic, and in ours as a companion! To receive from his contemporaries that 30 full homage which men of genius have in general received only from posterity!—To be more intimately known to posterity than other men are known to their contemporaries!

withhold some expression of anger, like Sir Hugh in the comedy, when I happen to find that a woman has a beard. I must therefore warn the gentle Phyllis that she send me no more letters from the Horse Guards."

That kind of fame which is commonly the most transient is, in his case, the most durable. The reputation of those writings, which he probably expected to be immortal, is every day fading ; while those peculiarities of manner and that careless
5 table-talk, the memory of which he probably thought would die with him, are likely to be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe.

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